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A qualitative descriptive study exploring the experiences of student midwives' in the care of women with perinatal loss

ABSTRACT

Background: Student midwives often encounter perinatal loss, for example, stillbirth and neonatal death, as part of their experience of clinical practice. Coping with these events can be challenging because loss and death are the antitheses of birth, which predominates in midwifery practice. The impact of bereavement care and the student support system have received little understanding in the literature. There has been limited research on how student midwives are supported when caring for women with bereavement; however, it is anticipated that the support students receive may have repercussions on the future practice of midwives. The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of final year student midwives when encountering a perinatal loss.

Methods: Two focus groups were conducted with ten final year BSc (Hons) Midwifery students. The focus groups lasted just under one hour and used a semi-structured interview schedule. The experiences of students in caring for women following bereavement were explored. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Findings: Four key themes were identified from analysis of the data: 1) Preparation for perinatal loss, 2) 'Just dealing with it', 3) Contradiction and challenges with the role of the midwife, 4) Emotional impact and coping strategies.

Conclusion: Students believe they were ill-prepared in caring for women with perinatal loss. Students reported difficulties in communicating with women following bereavement and believed they were excluded in caring for such women. Student's valued support from the bereavement midwife and identified effective coping strategies.

Keywords: Student midwives, perinatal loss, bereavement, qualitative methods, focus groups, experience, training and education.